

A comparison of principal costumes from productions of The Nutcracker at the National Ballet of Canada with those of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet within the context of Euro-Western tradition

By

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submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

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**For Meredith, Melanie, and Oliver  
Wilson**

## Abstract

Canada is the home of two internationally recognized ballet companies, the National Ballet of Canada and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. Both companies maintain a tradition of presenting *The Nutcracker* during the Christmas season, a ritual that can be found throughout North America and increasing in popularity within Western Europe.

The first objective of this study is to add to the limited body of knowledge of ballet as an art form by examining the similarities and differences in costumes of representative figures in the production of *The Nutcracker* between the National Ballet of Canada and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. Further objectives document the history of *The Nutcracker* at the two ballet companies and examine the importance of the role of the tradition within each production of the companies.

The objectives were achieved using the historical method based upon the work of Skjelver (1971) and utilizing the classification systems of Schlick (1988) and Roach-Higgins & Eicher (1992). From archival sources, costumes of the four principal roles of *The Nutcracker* were analyzed for silhouette, design line, costume detail, color value, and volume. The importance of tradition to the two ballet companies was traced and a discernable connection was established.

Canada's two largest ballet companies, established in distinctly different geographical locations, have approached costumes in a similar manner for productions of *The Nutcracker*. Each company has embraced the seasonal tradition of producing *The Nutcracker*.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout North America and increasing in popularity within Western Europe, *The Nutcracker* ballet has become a Yuletide seasonal phenomenon. The New York Times critic, Jack Anderson (1966) wrote, "Almost without our being aware of it, we have established a tradition" (p. 47). *The Nutcracker* has become as popular as Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, Handel's *Messiah*, and Clement Clarke Moore's *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*. Most major ballet companies maintain *The Nutcracker* in their repertoire. It is performed by countless non-professional groups, dancing schools, and community theatres across the country. There are as many adaptations of the libretto and plot, changes in styles of décor and costume as there are ballet companies, but one thing remains certain, each year audiences young and old anticipate its arrival.

Canada is the home of two internationally recognized ballet companies, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, in Winnipeg, and the National Ballet of Canada, in Toronto. Both companies maintain a tradition of producing *The Nutcracker* during the Christmas season for Canadian audiences, a ritual that can be found throughout North America.

This thesis is interested in comparing and contrasting costume history of *The Nutcracker* between two ballet companies, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and the National Ballet of Canada and in recognizing *The Nutcracker* as an established tradition in North America.

## PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand the differences and similarities in costume between two major Canadian ballet companies. The second purpose of this study is to examine the tradition of *The Nutcracker* as a yearly Yuletide seasonal production. Lastly, this study enhances the existing limited body of knowledge by the recognition of the value of costumes to productions and promotes appreciation for ballet as an art form.

Costumes for *The Nutcracker* are designed and created in an attempt to maintain the integrity of the production as a whole and are characterized by differences in the visual conception portrayed to the audience. What are the differences between the productions of *The Nutcracker* from two distinct regions of Canada, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and the National Ballet? What are the differences and similarities of costuming that occurred in the productions?

Caitlin Sims (1996) conducted a survey to celebrate the tradition of *The Nutcracker*. The informal survey received responses from over 200 companies and schools from around the world. From these results, she concluded that a total of 2,686,068 people attended a performance of *The Nutcracker* during the 1995/96 season. Given such numbers, one has to ask what makes this production a tradition for Euro-Western cultures and what was the value of this production for ballet companies?

The use of the word tradition is often attached to *The Nutcracker* when describing it in popular writings. S. Bronner (1998) states that the use of the terminology in expressing tradition in newspapers and related publications is associated with holiday customs and takes on the meaning of something repeated annually but not requiring that its past be rooted in a lengthy time period. E. Hobsbawn (1983) in explaining the word

tradition within a culture adds that it reflects the constant change and innovation of the modern world. E. Shils (1981) classifies tradition as anything that has “been created through human actions, through thought and imagination... handed down from one generation to the next” (p.12). It appears that *The Nutcracker* fits within the definitions and the structure of tradition.

### Nutcracker ballet

*The Nutcracker* ballet is based upon an adaptation of a story by E.T.A. Hoffman entitled *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*. J. Anderson (1979) and R. Wiley (1984) describe the original libretto of the ballet *The Nutcracker* that premiered in St. Petersburg, Russia in the Maryinsky Theatre on December 18, 1892. The story opens on Christmas Eve, sometime during the 1800s and is set in the small German town of Nuremberg famous for its toy makers.

Act one of the tale is set in the parlor of the town councilman, Herr Silberhaus and his wife Mrs. Silberhaus who are throwing a large holiday celebration for their family and friends. Their two children, Clara and Fritz, await the arrival of the guests and eagerly anticipate the gifts they will receive. After the arrival of the numerous guests, the children are assembled for the presentation of gifts. The excited children open their brightly colored gifts in front of the giant Christmas tree and there is a great deal of merriment as they play with the toys they have received.

A latecomer arrives at the party, Herr Drosselmayer, the godfather of Clara, who brings gifts of exquisite mechanical dolls that are unwrapped and placed in the middle of the stage. Drosselmayer, a clockmaker is a commanding figure with a black patch over one eye and an air of mystery. The dolls stand motionless until Drosselmayer winds them

up with his key and magically the dolls spring to life. As a special gift to Clara he presents her with an unusual toy, a colorful Nutcracker that instantly enthralles her and captivates her attention. Fritz is jealous of Clara's gift and in a tussle to take the Nutcracker away from her, Fritz breaks the head of the toy. Clara is heartbroken but Drosselmayer with his special skills is able to mend the Nutcracker.

After the party's conclusion and after the guests have returned to their homes, the entire family retires to their beds. Clara, unable to forget her wounded Nutcracker, sneaks back to the Christmas tree to find him. Magical and strange things begin to occur: Drosselmayer appears atop the room's clock, the Christmas tree begins to grow larger, and all the children's toys come magically alive. Suddenly the parlor is infested with nasty mice commanded by the ferocious seven-headed Mouse King and a fierce battle ensues with the nutcracker, gingerbread soldiers, grenadiers, hussars, and artillerymen. When it appears that the mice are about to win the battle, Clara removes one of her slippers and hurls it at the Mouse King striking a harmful blow. At his demise, the Nutcracker is transformed into a handsome young prince who in battle mortally wounds the Mouse King and conquers the mice. As a reward for her valor and devotion to the Nutcracker, Clara is carried away by her beloved Prince to the beautiful Land of Snow.

The second act is a series of divertissements that does not elaborate on the story line of the first act but exists as a showcase for the dancers. The second act unfolds to reveal Clara and her Prince as spectators to the Waltz of the Snowflakes. The wind and the blizzard are represented by thirty dancers choreographed in geometric patterns of movement. At the conclusion of the waltz they enter into the kingdom of the Land of Sweets, ruled by the Sugar Plum Fairy. Clara and the Prince are greeted by the Sugar



Plum Fairy who rewards their bravery in the battle with the Mouse King by providing, in their honor, a grand party of delicious things to eat: tea, coffee, hot chocolate, and candy canes. Each of the sweets is envisioned from a far off foreign land and is represented by divertissements of symbolical dances from Spain, China, and Arabia. The entertainment continues with the Dance of the Mirilitons, or toy flutes and the Waltz of the Flowers. The Sugar Plum Fairy and her cavalier, Prince Coqueluche dance the focal point of the second act, the *pas de deux*. Like all good things the entertainment comes to an end and Clara and her real life Nutcracker return from the Kingdom of the Sweets to the earthly world.

#### Dramatis Personae

Silberhaus – Town councilman of Nuremberg

Mrs. Silberhaus – Wife of Silberhaus

**Clara** – Daughter of Silberhaus

Fritz – Son of Silberhaus

**Drosselmayer** – Godfather of Clara

**Nutcracker** – Prince

Mouse King – Fearsome head of the mice

**Sugar Plum Fairy**

Prince Coqueluche- Cavalier of the Sugar Plum Fairy

Guests, servants, mechanical dolls, toy soldiers, army of mice, gingerbread soldiers, hussars, grenadiers, artillerymen, flowers, snowflakes, tea, coffee, chocolate, flutes.

There are countless versions of *The Nutcracker* performed each year throughout the country. Sims (1996) in a survey of *The Nutcracker* productions across North America estimates that an average production employs 109 dancers and may have as many as 200 dancers filling out the cast. The multitude of costumes designed for such productions reaches a staggering number. This thesis looked at the costumes of the four principal roles within the productions as being representative of the libretto. The four characters were identified according to the names occurring in the original libretto: Clara, Nutcracker, Drosselmayer, and Sugar Plum Fairy.

### OBJECTIVES

There were four specific objectives to this study.

1. To document the similarities and differences in costumes of four principal figures in productions of *The Nutcracker* between two major Canadian ballet companies, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet Company and the National Ballet of Canada.
2. To document the history of *The Nutcracker* at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and the National Ballet of Canada.
3. To add to the existing limited body of knowledge in Canadian ballet history thereby increasing awareness of ballet as an art form.
4. To document the role of tradition of *The Nutcracker* at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and the National Ballet of Canada.

## JUSTIFICATION

The topic of costume history is not well documented in ballet productions in general and it has received little attention on the local or national level within Canada. In recognition of the need for documentation of dance research, the Society for Canadian Dance Studies was formed toward the end of 2000 in Toronto. The Society's mandate is to promote preservation of Canadian dance history and to increase the profile of Canadian dance studies in the academic environment and in the general populous. The value of this study appears to be timely.

The tradition of Yuletide presentations of *The Nutcracker* is a phenomenon that appears to be established in Canada and in other regions of North America. Documentation of the performance and costume history of *The Nutcracker Ballet* by the two major Canadian ballet companies will assist in enhancing the awareness of ballet in the creative arts as well as its value in society.

The importance of maintaining a production of *The Nutcracker* each Christmas season was explained by Philip Rosemond (personal communication, November 23, 2000). Mr. Rosemond has been a choreographer for twenty years and has danced principal roles in *The Nutcracker* in several different major companies in North America. He stated that most companies have determined that *The Nutcracker* is the economic basis for generating funds and sustaining the company. To exclude the production from its repertoire is to invite economic disaster during a time when monetary funds for the arts have seen drastic cutbacks.

## LIMITATIONS

This study was limited to the productions of *The Nutcracker* at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and the National Ballet of Canada from its introduction into the repertoire of the companies up to and including the 2000 season.

The four principal characters of each seasonal *Nutcracker* production performed were examined. The time span of the study was a period of approximately 36 years involving productions from two ballet companies. The average number of dancers (109) would entail researching costumes of a huge magnitude even with the knowledge that new costumes would not have been constructed each year of the productions' presentation. Four prominent roles were therefore chosen as being a significant representation for documenting costume history.

### Definitions

The following definitions, taken from Greskovic (1998) were used in this study:

**Classical Tutu** – A special short dance costume composed of a bodice, basque, and briefs with many layers of net sewn to the briefs forming a crisp, inverted umbrella shape.

**Divertissement** – A dance number offered to divert the audience's attention with momentary entertainment. Displays of dancing for the sake of dancing, rather than for the sake of narrative or dramatic effect.

**Libretto** – The text of a long musical work.

**Pas de deux** – The piece de resistance of the ballet structure in the classical ballet. The partnering of the leading male and female dancers in a "dance for two".

**Performance** – A theatrical work executed before a live audience.

**Production** – A theatrical work.

**Romantic tutu** – A dancewear costume composed of a bodice, basque, and briefs with layers of net falling from the briefs to approximately 13 inches from the floor and forming a soft, bell-like silhouette.

## CHAPTER TWO

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The history of Peter Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* reveals a vast quantity of variations of the libretto throughout the years from that originally scored by the choreographer Marius Petipa and completed by the second ballet master and Petipa's assistant, Lev Ivanov. The Cincinnati Ballet in 1979 danced *The Nutcracker* similar to the old production by the Vic-Wells Ballet of 1934; Nureyev's controversial Royal Ballet production of 1968 reinterpreted the character personalities, and in 1966 the Stuttgart Ballet by John Cranko changed the libretto and setting of the story (Clarke, 1968; Clark, 1976; Anderson, 1979). The one aspect that has remained constant throughout in virtually all productions is the musical score composed by Tchaikovsky in 1892 (Patrick, 1998).

In 1891, Ivan Alexandrovitch Vsevolozhsky, Director of the Imperial Theatres in St. Petersburg, Russia, commissioned Peter Tchaikovsky to compose a score for a new ballet. The previous year, *The Sleeping Beauty*, with Tchaikovsky as composer and Marius Petipa as choreographer, had been a triumphant success. Vsevolozhsky was anxious to sustain the success of the company by producing another profitable ballet utilizing the talents of both Tchaikovsky and Petipa. He chose a story based on E.T.A. Hoffman's tale of *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* published in 1816 (Wiley, 1985). Alexandre Dumas had written a popular French interpretation of the tale entitled *The Nutcracker of Nuremberg*. It was this version that Vsevolozhsky and Petipa adopted as the basis for their ballet (Anderson, 1979).

Petipa submitted to Tchaikovsky his detailed notes for the choreography of the ballet for the composer to use as his working plan. Tchaikovsky had misgivings

concerning the fragile theme of the ballet finding it without substance and lacking the beauty of *Swan Lake* or *Sleeping Beauty*, his previous successes. He felt it was doomed to fail. During early rehearsals of the ballet, Petipa became ill, leaving the choreography to be completed by his assistant Lev Ivanov (Anderson, 1979).

*The Nutcracker* premiered on December 18, 1892 at the Maryinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, conducted by Riccardo Drigo and costumed by Vsevolozsky. The reviews were not favorable and it received only a lukewarm reception from the Russian audience. Although the musical score and the choreography were not appreciated during *The Nutcracker's* first performance, the costumes were praised, as reported by Wiley (1985) in a letter stating, "we read reports praising the drawings of the costumes:... one more beautiful than the last, and [they] reveal their artist's excellent taste both in elegance and in the combination of colours" (p. 204). Neither Tchaikovsky nor his critics could have predicted that *The Nutcracker* would become the most famous work of his three ballets and the *Nutcracker Suite* one of the world's best-known concert pieces.

The first important staging of *The Nutcracker* in Western Europe opened at the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells Theatres on January 30, 1934. The ballet company of Vic Wells under the direction of Russian teacher, Nicholas Sergeyev, presented a production based upon the recollections of Sergeyev from the time he spent at the Maryinsky under Petipa. When he departed from Russia for Britain, he took with him a copy of the notated scores of the original choreography from Petipa's collection. The Russian influence of *The Nutcracker* was well received in London despite the criticism of several sections of the choreography (Anderson, 1979). The Vic Wells ballet, later named the Sadler's Wells, and then in recognition of its contribution to contemporary ballet received a Royal Charter

becoming the Royal Ballet of Britain, produced the ballet under the French title, *Casse-Noisette* (Patrick, 1998).

Nureyev presented his rather controversial production with the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden, London in 1968. Often described as boring and excessively opulent with an eccentric twist of characters, it has still seen several revivals (Clarke, 1968). By 1976, the popularity of *The Nutcracker* had risen and could be seen performed during the Christmas season by four different companies, the Royal Ballet, Festival Ballet, the Scottish Ballet, and Ballet International.

By 1973, in the Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh, Scotland, The Scottish Theatre Ballet presented its first full-length version of *The Nutcracker*. The second act had been performed the previous year and its success had led Peter Darrell to expand the production. It opened on December 19 to record advance box-office sales (Goodwin, 1974).

*The Nutcracker* spread across Western Europe with different adaptations although the music of Tchaikovsky would be a constant characteristic of the productions. In 1937 it appeared in La Scala, Milan with costumes produced by the artist Alexander Benois and exhibiting a departure from the original designs and story line. Paris Opera-Comique presented its version the following year. The Royal Danish Ballet, one of the oldest ballet companies in existence, staged a traditional production of *The Nutcracker* in 1971, delighting the Copenhagen audience (Anderson, 1979).

If Western Europe was entertained by *The Nutcracker*, the home of its intense popularity has become North America. The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo is credited with its arrival on the American stage. October 17, 1940, the touring company composed mainly of Russian descendents, presented an abbreviated version of *The Nutcracker* at the



51<sup>st</sup> Street Theater, New York City. Because of the success it received, *The Nutcracker* remained in the repertoire of the company. Caught in America with the outbreak of World War II, the company remained in the United States thus becoming an American ballet company in all but its name (Maynard, 1973).

The first full-length American *Nutcracker* was choreographed by William Christensen for the San Francisco Ballet and staged in 1944. Influenced by the presence of a large White Russian balletomane community and the need to fill the vacant Opera House during the Christmas season, Christensen deliberated with Alexandra Danilova, ballerina of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the Russian-born choreographer George Balanchine (Maynard, 1973). Anderson (1979) writes that Balanchine was immensely enthusiastic about the project as “perhaps being the seed out of which would grow a new Balanchine production of *The Nutcracker* a decade later” (p. 109-112).

P. Rosemond (personal communication, November 23, 2000) clarified the beginnings of the popularity of *The Nutcracker*. In 1953, George Balanchine recognized that if marketed correctly, a spectacular production of *The Nutcracker* could generate a great deal of money for the company thus allowing the company to continue through the season with less debt. He had the foresight to see that it could become the new seasonal phenomenon. On February of 1954 the New York City Ballet, at New York City Center, presented its most costly production to date (Taper, 1963). *The Nutcracker* was so successful that it was performed the following year in December and almost doubled ticket sales. Reviewed by Walter Terry, February 3, 1954 he wrote, “It is, indeed, a real spectacle, rich in excitement, impeccable in taste and by all indications of audience response, a roaring hit” (p. 286).

Balanchine recognized the value of the rising medium of television although he remained skeptical that it would adequately portray the power of ballet. In 1958 he produced an adaptation of his *Nutcracker* for a 90-minute live broadcast on CBS. The success of this work was followed over the years by other versions during the holiday season (Fisher, 1998).

Balanchine redesigned his successful ballet in 1964 to accommodate the increased size of the New York City Ballet's new home, Lincoln Centre (McDonagh, 1983). It remains such a durable success that today its five-week run continues to be sold-out in advance of its Christmas season. The American tradition of the seasonal performance of *The Nutcracker* was firmly established with the success of Balanchine's New York creation (P. S. Rosemond, personal communication, Nov. 23, 2000).

#### Royal Winnipeg Ballet

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet is the second oldest ballet company in North America (Wyman, 1978). The distinction of the oldest North American ballet company is held by the San Francisco Ballet established in 1933. The development of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet grew out of the Winnipeg Ballet Club established by Gweneth Lloyd and Betty Farrally in the spring of 1938. Lloyd, with her friend Betty Farrally, had arrived from England with a passion for dance and a desire to establish a venue for ballet. The Winnipeg Ballet Club performed its first-full scale presentation at the Playhouse Theatre on June 11, 1940. Choreographed by Lloyd, it offered a program that appealed to everyone, a characteristic of the company that was its foundation for success and continued audience appeal (Wyman, 1978). The program consisted of seven *Divertissements* in the classical style set to the music of Tchaikovsky and Arensky, a three act comedy ballet *The Wager*,